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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000217

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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
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SUBJECT: PRT-GARDEZ: NEW PAKTIA GOVERNOR,S VIEWS ON KEY  
ISSUES

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Classified By: A/PolCouns Martin Murphy for reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Paktia Governor Rahmatullah Rahmat shared his views on major issues facing the Province during recent meetings with the Gardez PRT. Rahmat identified development activities as key to ensuring a stable and productive province. The Governor praised PRT development projects and pledged to finish a draft five-year development plan under Provincial Development Council (PDC) auspices by early 2007. Rahmat showed genuine support for counternarcotics measures and indicated he planned to use part of Paktia's USD 500,000 "good performance" award to subsidize alternative sources of income for hashish farmers. The Governor supported completely coalition/US military efforts to secure the strategic Khost/Gardez pass and vowed to try to negotiate with local insurgents in order to bring them into the government fold. (Biographical information in para 6) END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) During recent joint PRT staff briefing of newly installed Paktia Governor Rahmatullah Rahmat, the Governor expressed a keen interest in development, security, and reconstruction issues of importance to PRT and exuded an assertive, pro-active personal style and approach to his responsibilities.

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Development is Priority  
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¶3. (SBU) Governor Rahmat told PRT that economic development projects, including several conducted by PRT, are the most important activities underway in Paktia. He cited specifically an agricultural research and extension center, a

district high school, and a provincial orphanage. These projects were critical in winning the allegiance of local communities to the government in all areas, not just in vulnerable zones. He also expressed a full appreciation for proper development planning and recognized that Paktia had not drafted a needed five-year plan, in part due to the absence of a governor following the assassination of Rahmat,s predecessor last July. To remedy this situation expeditiously, the Governor asserted that he would convene a special commission of all key government agencies (he mentioned the MRRD, health, education, and power departments specifically and members of the National Democratic Institute - NDI) to finalize a five-year plan by early 2007. He indicated this special commission would function under the auspices of the PDC. The goal of the commission would be to evaluate provincial needs and maximize available resources, including international assistance.

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Good Performer on Counternarcotics  
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¶4. (SBU) The Governor acknowledged having accepted in November a "good performance" award from the central government for being one of six poppy-free provinces nation-wide. Rahmat displayed a true-believer's fervor on the narcotics issue. He pledged both to keep Paktia poppy-free and to eliminate existing hashish production in the province. The governor told PRT that he had met with shuras from the three principal hashish production districts -- Jaji, Chamkani, and Zormat -- and warned them that farmers must plant alternative crops next spring or provincial authorities would eradicate any hashish production. Rahmat said he was not concerned about any backlash from these sometimes volatile areas and that he intended to use part of the USD 500K good performance award to assist the farmers in

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developing other sources of income. ( Note: The PRT has proposed, for example, subsidizing efforts to grow saffron, another high-value crop, in hashish growing areas of Zormat. End Note )

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Security: Need More ANA  
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¶4. (C) Rahmat expressed particular interest in local U.S. military efforts to establish an ANA facility/base for the first time in the strategic Khost/Gardez pass linking the two provinces. He acknowledged that the pass was a "dangerous" area frequented by Haqqani insurgents. Indeed, Haqqani,s family is based in the zone. (Note: U.S. military sources indicate that 24 IED attacks have occurred in the pass since July 2006. End Note). Rahmat applauded the U.S. initiative and predicted that the base would have a significant impact in deterring insurgent activities along the key transportation route. In addition, Rahmat revealed plans to reinforce the ANA and ANP presence on the main road leading into the province from the south, which he feels is another source of insurgent influx into the province. (Note: The Governor clearly has a strong desire to increase ANA presence in the area. He has stated that the ANA in the area are weak and believes the only way to increase security in the area is through an increased ANA presence. Since the meeting with PRT, the ANA facility was inaugurated in December and has a garrison of one company of ANA effectives. End Note)

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Comment  
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¶5. (SBU) Rahmat appears capable of providing a spark that is severely lacking in the Paktia Government since the assassination of former governor Hakim Taniwal last July. Significantly, he has expressed his intention to travel

throughout the province in order to solve local disputes, to try to address complaints from recalcitrant areas under insurgent influence, and to assess and monitor development needs and activities. This type of leadership style should lend itself well to a province dependent principally on the initiative of its chief executive. Rahmat seems unafraid of the dangers inherent in such forthright public activities in an uncertain security situation. END COMMENT

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Biographic Data  
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¶6. (U) Rahmatullah Rahmat was born in 1950 in Rodat District in Nangarhar Province. He is an ethnic Pashtun from the Mohamed tribe whose father was a mullah in Nangahar. He attended primary and secondary school in Rodat and later received degrees from the Kabul teacher training academy (1969) and from Tashkent University in Uzbekistan (1987). He also studied in Moscow in 1987-89 where he received a political science certificate from the Moscow Social Science Institute.

¶7. (U) Rahmat served as a teacher and school administrator both in Nangarhar and Kabul from 1969 until the mid 1980s. The communist regime tabbed him to be Deputy Governor of Nangarhar province in 1986, and he continued in that position until 1993. Rahmat was absent from his post, however, during 1987-89 in order to further his education in the Soviet Union. He resigned as Deputy Governor in 1992 due to his opposition to government policies. Following the fall of the communist regime, he worked in several positions within the Nangarhar chapter of De Sule Au Islami Warorwalai Jabha ("Islamic Brotherhood and Peace Organization") that strove unsuccessfully to reconcile the disparate resistance groups in post-jihad Afghanistan. In 1994 he began a career with

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international NGOs active in the country. He served as local supervisor for IRC programs in Nangarhar (1994-97), and as a field assistant for IOM in Farah Province (2000) before holding positions with UNAMA, including senior political assistant, from 2002 until his appointment as Governor of Paktia in November 2006.

¶8. (U) Rahmat is married and has 12 children (one wife). His permanent residence is in Jalalabad, Nangarhar province. He speaks Dari, Pashto, and some English (comprehension appears adequate but limited speaking ability).  
NEUMANN